The Literary History of the Age of Queen Anne

by Georgia Lillian Bell

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A Graduation Thesis Submitted to the University of Kansas

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This age was at one time called the Augustan Age of Literature, from its supposed resemblance to the intellectual era of Emperor Augustus; but it is now given a second place in English literature, as regards the quality and decided merit of its prose and verse.

During the reign of Queen Anne England was as great in literature as in war. An author says:- "Writers of deeper tone and weightier calibre have lived at other times; but there is probably no period so short in which so many famous books have been given to the world, or in which forces have had their roots destined so powerfully to influence the future."

At this time literature was encouraged and supported by men who were able by their official position to command the ear of the sovereign, or who contributed liberally from their own wealth and influence. Books were generally published under a system of patronage: a subscription sufficiently large to warrant the publication was obtained or contributed, before the book was placed in the hands of the publisher.

Literature and politics joined hands for mutual favor and benefit. It was a time in which party spirit ran high. There were no newspapers to report proceedings: reporters were prohibited from giving to the public the debates, speeches, and discussions of Parliament. So that political warfare was waged by means of clubs, coffee-houses, and pamphlets, and each party was eager to engage the services of the best writers.

The two great parties were the Whig, and the Tory. Addison and Steele are considered the best writers that wielded the pen for Whig supremacy; while on the Tory side

the palm is awarded to Swift and Pope. Defoe was a vigorous and influential pamphleteer, though he was not a strict partisan. He supported the revolution, defending William and his policy with marked influence and success.

Addison and Steele by the publication of the Tatler, Spectator, and Guardian, - made literature, issues, ideas, and opinions, receive more attention from the mass of the English people. It is said that the Spectator is the ancestor of the modern newspaper and magazine. It contained criticisms, essays, and the news: modern newspapers combine criticism and news, and the magazine presents the essays and criticisms minus the news.

The Drama

Immediately after the restoration of Charles II, a universal reaction against stern Puritanism set in, and the morals and manners of the rising generation were as loose, corrupt, and licentious, as those of the preceding one had been strict, stereotyped and comparatively pure.

The stage took on the immorality prevalent, and degenerated until the intellect of the country was ashamed of it, and, for the most part, turned its attention to other walks of literature.

Addison, Steele, and Collier, had by their delicate and insinuating wit and sarcasm, improved its quality, though ladies of the highest respectability still hesitated to frequent the theatre.

Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar, are the three greatest comic dramatists of this age. Congreve wrote "The Old Bachelor," "The Double Dealer," and "Love for Love." The wit and repartee permeating his plays, are their greatest recommendation.

"The Relapse", "The Provoked Wife," "The Confederacy", and "The Journey to London," are the greatest works of Vanbrugh. His characters, though often coarse and vicious, are invested with more reality than Congreve's.

George Farquahar was the author of "The Constant Couple," "The Beaux's Stratagem," and other comedies. He is less coarse than Vanbrugh, and more natural than Congreve. But the morality exhibited in the plays of all these authors is of a very low standard.

Nicholas Rowe was the chief tragic writer of this age. "The Fair Penitent," "Jane Shore," five other tragedies, one comedy, and a translation in rhyme of Lucan's Pharsalia, — are products of his pen. He was regarded in his day as a great master of the pathetic.

— Fiction — (Prose)

Up to this time, wandering knights and troubadours, returning adventurers and explorers, legends of saints, and romances of chivalry, — took the place of the modern novel. It was left to Daniel Defoe to bring fiction within the realm of realities, and to give charm and interest to domestic and practical (common) life in the field of literature.

— Defoe — (1662-1731) —

Daniel Defoe, who has been called the "father of the English novel", — was born in London, 1662, and was the son of James Foe, a butcher. In after years he prefixed De- to Foe, and he has been known by the name of Defoe ever since.

He was educated at a dissenting academy at Newington Green, and in 1682 began his career as an author. He published a number

of pamphlets, and in 1701 appeared his famous satirical poem, the "True-born Englishman," which was written in vindication of King William, and in answer to a poem in which William had been attacked, called "The Foreigner." This poem proved a wonderful success; 80,000 pirated copies of it were sold on the streets at a trifling price.

Defoe was imprisoned for the publication of "The Shortest Way with Dissenters." While in prison he wrote a "Hymn to the Pillory," and upon his release in 1709 he issued the Review, a periodical which he published for nine years.

Defoe was not a partisan though he always vigorously supported the principles of the Revolution against those of the Jacobites.

His literary renown rests chiefly upon his works of fiction, all of which were written after he was fifty-eight years old. "Robinson Crusoe" (1719), "Journal of the Plague" and "Memoirs of a Cavalier" (1722), the "New Voyage Round the World" (1725-) and the "Memoirs of Captain Carleton" (1728) are among the best. "Robinson Crusoe" is the most widely known and read among modern readers.

His powers of description were so vivid, and the individuality and reality with which he invested his characters caused them to be received and read as true history by even such a noted author as Samuel Johnson.

"Defoe did as much as any one man, partly by secret intrigue, partly through the public press, perhaps as much as any two men outside those in the immediate direction of affairs, to accomplish the two great objects which William bequeathed to English statesmanship — the union of England and Scotland, and the

succession to the United Kingdom of a Protestant dynasty." Minto

He died in 1731.

— Prose Continued —

— Swift. (1667. 1745.)

Jonathan Swift is considered the greatest of English satirists, and the most original writer of his age.

He was born in Dublin Ireland, on the 30th of November 667.

His parents were English though he received his education in the land of his birth, — and spent many years of his life there; the Irish regard him as their countryman.

He was supported by relatives, and educated at Kilkenny school and Trinity College, Dublin.

As a student he was far from successful. Whether it was through negligence and aversion to study, or to disdain of scholastic methods, - he received his degree of Bachelor of Arts by special favor, - which, at that college, denoted want of merit.

But as if to make up for lost time he, after receiving his degree, - studied eight hours a day for seven years.

At the end of seven years he went to England, paid a visit to his mother in Leicestershire, and by her advice and recommendation was received into the house of Sir William Temple as secretary. Swift remained with Temple, studying hard, till 1694. when he went to Ireland, took orders in the Church, and obtained a small living. But in two years he returned to his old post of secretaryship, at the solicitation of Temple who appreciated and greatly missed his society and services.

The death of Temple occurred in 1698, and in the following

year Swift published his posthumous works, after which he returned to Ireland. He had obtained from Lord Berkley some church preferments, including the vicarage of Laracor, worth in all about £400 per annum, - which was all the professional income he enjoyed till he was appointed Dean of St. Patrick's in his 46th year.

Such preferments as Swift managed to secure were very much below what his ambition aspired, and longing to return to England where he could take part in the literary and political activity of the day - he launched into politics

At first he advocated Whig principles, but in 1710 he joined the Tories and directed all his satire, sarcasm, and venome at his former friends, with powerful and unscrupulous efforts.

Authorities differ as to the reason for this change of party Some say that it was through resentment at not having been recognized and promoted by Whig leaders. Others say that he deserted the Whigs because they abandoned Whig principles; - while another says that he was always a Tory in church affairs; but a Whig in governmental policy.

It is very difficult and many times impossible to ascertain the motives of living men; and when generations have risen and gone since the death of a literary or political light, it is still more difficult to judge of the motives occasioning any special act or event. However, Swift was a valuable addition to the Tories, and his powerful pamphlets often turned popular opinion and public policy into the channel most favorable to his party

Of his writings, the "Tale of a Tub" (1704) and "Gulliver's Travels

(1726), are considered his best productions.

The "Tale of a Tub" is a powerful satire, whose object was to defend and exalt the Church of England, at the expense of Romanists and Presbyterians. The book was widely read and admired but severely censured. It gave the impression that the author was trying to ridicule religion itself out of existence. But if Swift's meaning was misunderstood, it is nevertheless certain that it raised an effectual bar to further promotion in the Church. It is said that this work was its author's favorite.

"Gulliver's Travels" is of all his works, the most familiar to modern readers. It is a satire of man, and is considered the most original and characteristic of his productions. It is the journal of an adventurer, or rather voyager, who describes different countries and races of people; in which man is is pictured in all the littleness of the Pigmy world, and human frailties and insignificance revealed by comparison with a race of giants.

A series of letters called "Drapier Letters" (1724), which were the means of defeating a plan for supplying the Irish market with copper coinage, made him the darling and favorite of the Irish people, from that time forth.

As regards the style of his composition, a writer describes it as "simple, plain, pure, rugged, vigorous Saxon. Without ornament, it is rich in the variety of its words and phrases. Always understanding himself, he was always understood by others." In assigning his rank the same author says: "In originality and strength he has no superior, and in

irony no equal. He had the genius of insult, as Shakespeare of poetry. Unscrupulous sarcasm and vituperation, crushing logic, knowledge of men and life, vehement expression, made him the most formidable pamphleteer that ever lived. He was deficient in refinement of taste and loftiness of imagination, and lacked the nobility of nature to become a true poet, philosopher, or reformer. The grandeurs of the human spirit escaped him. Palpable and familiar objects, common words, common things, were the sources of his inspiration. Several peculiarities contributed to produce his effect,—skilful minuteness of narrative; power to give to fiction the air of truth; the habit of expressing sentiments, the most absurd or atrocious, as sober commonplaces; of relating the most ludicrous and extravagant fancies with an invincible gravity. As a man, he is the most tragic figure in our literature.

It is said that music had no charms for him, and that Nature never called from him expressions of appreciation, pleasure, and delight, as she does from most great poets and authors. The misanthropy, cynicism, and materialism of his nature, brought him only disappointment, misery and vexation of spirit, although he was flattered and courted by dukes, ministers, and the admiration of the public.

The two persons who loved him most—Stella and Vanessa (Miss Johnson and Miss Vanhomrigh) died of broken hearts and blighted affection. It is not known to a certainty whether he married Stella at last, or not, but it is thought by most authorities that he did, although they cannot understand why he set the seal of privacy upon the act. It is probable

that the reason for his conduct and relations towards these lovely women, will remain shrouded in mystery. However, it is reasonable to suppose that there were several causes. He undoubtedly had a presentiment that insanity lurked in his veins and would eventually take possession of his brain. Then he was a poor man until late in life, - was ambitious, and had a horror of being dependent. But if he did not think it just or expedient to enjoy matrimonial felicity, he was not willing to forego all the pleasures which adoration and intellectual companionship and congeniality gave in the persons of Stella and Vanessa.

During an evening walk he said to Young - the author of Night Thoughts - "I shall be like that tree; I shall die at the top." His prediction was verified. After becoming a maniac, and then an idiot, he died Oct. 19, 1745; - the last three years of his life having been passed in almost total silence in the hands of keepers. Swift's will made provision for an insane and idiotic asylum.

— Addison (1672-1719) —

Joseph Addison, the son of an eminent clergyman of the Church of England, was born at Milston, Wiltshire, May 1st, 1672. He completed his education at the university of Oxford where he greatly distinguished himself, especially by the facility with which he wrote Latin verse.

Instead of taking holy orders as was first intended, he devoted himself to literature and politics, and was encouraged in this career by Dryden, who honored the young poet with his patronage.

In 1699, having received a pension of £300 a year he set out

on a continental tour, and while in France he perfected himself in the French language.

He early allied himself in the Whig party and the "Campaign", or "Victory of Blenheim", placed him in the first rank of the Whigs, and procured him the office of Commissioner of Appeals. From this time forth he was involved in politics, and filled a number of offices.

His works comprise letters, poems, essays, and one tragedy. "The Tragedy of Cato" was very popular, but is lacking in dramatic power. — It is his connection with the Tatler, Spectator, and Guardian, that has established his fame, and given him the first rank among British essayists.

His essays, which were intended to instruct as well as to please, comprehended a variety of subjects, furnishing entertainment to all classes of readers. There were sketches of society in all its various phases; social vices were exposed in such a manner as to disguise the intention of the author; letters, allegories, narratives, stories, portraits of character, criticisms, and articles on such subjects as the "Immortality of the Soul", "Pleasures of the Imagination".

The character of Sir Roger de Coverley, one of the best characters feigned in the Spectator, and said to be Addison's favorite, — is a faithful reflection of a simple-hearted, humorous, whole-souled country gentleman, of the best type.

As to Addison's style, the following quotations from Welsh and from Johnson, seem to express the general opinion of critics. Welsh: "Style — luminous, graceful, vivid, elegant, familiar, and even, never blazing into unexpected splendor; the exact words, the clear contrasts, the harmonious periods of classical refinement and finish,

happy inventions threaded by the most amiable irony."
Johnson — "His prose is the model of the middle style; on grave subjects not formal, on light occasions not grovelling; pure without scrupulosity, and exact without apparent elaboration; always equable, and always easy, without glowing words or pointed sentences. Addison never deviates from his track to snatch a grace; he seeks no ambitious ornaments, and tries no hazardous innovations. His page is always luminous, but never blazes in unexpected splendor."

Besides his contributions to the Tatler, Spectator and Guardian, Addison published "A Treatise on the Usefulness of Ancient Medals" and "The Evidences of the Christian Religion" — the last not finished.

In 1716, after a long courtship, Addison married the Dowager-Countess of Warwick, with whom he did not lead a very happy life. The year following his marriage he was appointed secretary of state, which position he resigned in 1718.

His health had been for some time in a precarious state, and after an illness of a few months he died at Holland House, Kensington, on the 17th of June, 1719, in the 48th year of his age, three years after what Thackeray calls "his splendid but dismal union."

This short sketch of Addison can be brought to a conclusion more satisfactorily by the following quotations from Courthope, the first of which refers to Macaulay's panegyric, describing Addison as "the unsullied statesman, the accomplished scholar, the consummate painter of life and manners, the great satirist who alone knew how to use ridicule without abusing it; who, without inflicting a wound, effected a great

social reform, and who reconciled wit and virtue, after a long and painful separation, during which wit had been led astray by profligacy, and virtue by fanaticism." × × × × ×

"A grateful posterity, remembering what it owes to him, will continue to assign him the reputation he coveted." "It was said of Socrates that he brought Philosophy down from heaven to inhabit among men; and I shall be ambitious to have it said of me that I have brought Philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell at clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee-houses."

— Steele (1672-1729) —

Sir Richard Steele, who has been called the "father of periodical writing", was born in Dublin 1671. His father, who was secretary to the Duke of Ormond, was English, but his mother was Irish, and it was from her that he inherited "the impulsive ardor, tenderness, bright fancy and reckless profusion immemorially ascribed to the Irish national character. He received his education at the Charterhouse School, where he became acquainted with Addison, and at Merton College, Oxford. For years he had a predilection for the army, and being unable to obtain a commission, he left college before receiving his degree and enlisted as a private in the Horse Guards. By taking this step he forfeited a rich inheritance intended for him by a rich relation of his mother. — In the army he rose to the rank of captain, but spent much of his time and energy in a reckless dissipation, which he always regretted, but from which he did not abstain. It is said that he spent his life sinning and repenting. To impose a check on his irregularities he wrote a religious treatise,

"The Christian Hero" (1701). But this work failed to reform him and excited not a little ridicule among his friends when the inconsistency of his actions and the principles laid down in this book were so obvious.

He next took to writing comedies. In 1702 he produced "The Funeral, or Grief à la Mode"; in 1703 "The Tender Husband"; and in 1704, "The Lying Lover". All were successful except the last which was a decided failure.

About this time he married a West Indian lady, who brought him a fortune, but she died within a few months.

In 1706 he was appointed Gazetteer with a salary of £300 per annum, and also the post of Gentleman Usher to Prince George, which brought him £100 a year.

In 1707 he married again, this time a Welsh lady, Mary Scurlock, to whom he was devotedly attached, and to whom he addressed some 400 letters admiring, apologetic, and passionate. The pair were quite extravagant, and they were more than once involved in financial difficulties, at once serious and unpleasant.

While Gazetteer he conceived the idea of an instructive and entertaining periodical, and in 1709 he issued the Tatler, a tri-weekly, which was followed by the Spectator, and the Guardian. He also attempted other periodicals, as The Lover, The Reader etc, but these were short-lived. His fame rests on his essays in the Tatler, Spectator, and Guardian, to which he contributed respectively 188, 240, and 82 papers. He was ably assisted in this work by Addison, and his generous and appreciative nature is evinced by the following tribute he pays to Addison: "I have only one gentleman, who will be nameless, to thank for any frequent assistance to me, which

indeed it would have been barbarous in him to have denied to one with whom he has lived in an intimacy from childhood, considering the great ease with which he is able to dispatch the most entertaining pieces of this nature. This good office he performed with such force of genius, humor, wit, and learning, that I fared like a distressed prince who calls in a powerful neighbor to his aid: I was undone by my auxilliary when I had once called him in, I could not subsist without dependence on him."

The life-long friendship between these congenial souls was broken in 1717 by a controversy over the once-famous Peerage Bill, in which contest, the side espoused by Steele was victorious.

In the keen political strife of the age, Steele was a vigorous supporter of Whig principles and the Hanover succession.

"The Crisis," a pamphlet in which he warned the nation that the Protestant cause was in danger, cost him the office of Gazetteer and caused him to be expelled from the House of Commons. But when Queen Anne died, and the Whigs were again triumphant, Steele participated in the royal favor; he received an appointment in the King's household, was elected M. P. for Boroughbridge, and received the honor of knighthood.

His last work was a successful comedy, "The Conscious Lovers," published in 1722. He spent the last years of his life in retirement in Wales, where he died Sept. 21st, 1729.

Berguer says of Steele: "He was a firm patriot, but a loyal subject, and in the fervor of his political career, he frequently lost sight of himself, but never of his country. * * * * Charitable both by impulse and by principle, his active benevolence ever sought for deserving objects. * * His admiration of superior merit was never lessened by any contrast

with his own imperfections, for he loved excellence — wherever he found it — with a feeling which no jealousy could approach, nor envy undermine. × × We cannot be severe upon Steele, for he was amiable even in his irregularities; and though some names command our deeper reverence, no memory can be more tenderly beloved."

— Periodical Miscellany —

Upon the accession of Queen Anne there was quite an accumulation of literature but it was not diffused, its circulation being rather limited. Literature was enjoyed only by scholars, wits, and men of letters. In the words of Bergner — "Men of the world, men of pleasure or of business, never read: fashion was yet unashamed of ignorance and the Mighty Mother swayed the acquiescing million."

It was left to Steele to level the barriers between ignorance and learning; and to issue a circulating medium that was to inaugurate an era of universal information and inquiry. It is to Steele that we are indebted for the Tatler, Spectator, and Guardian, and probably it is to him that we are indebted for Addison and the various contributors of these magazines. It was at his expense, risk, patience and perseverance, that their productions were placed before the public with such happy results and important benefits.

It was during Steele's employment as Gazette writer to the court that he conceived the idea of issuing a periodical.

The first number of the Tatler appeared April 12th 1709, and it was published on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.

Addison soon became he auxilliary, and together they published this and the two following periodicals, with occasional contributions from the pen of Swift, Pope, and others. The arrangement of the Tatler included the following subjects. 1. Gallantry, pleasure and

entertainment. 2. Poetry. 3. Learning. 4. Foreign and Domestic news. 5. Miscellaneous subjects. January 2nd, 1711, saw the last number of the Tatler. Two months later the Spectator began its career, the first number appearing March 1st, 1711. It has been estimated by good authority that the sale of the Spectator reached 14,000 daily. The last volume of the Spectator was issued Dec. 20th, 1714. Steele, assisted by Addison, then issued a periodical - the Guardian. After issuing 175 numbers it was abandoned and Steele became involved in political warfare.

An author, in estimating the influence of Steele and Addison as conveyed by the publication of these periodicals says:

"If we compare the state of society, private and public, as it existed previous and subsequent to the appearance of Addison and Steele, we shall not for a moment hesitate to assert, not only that Great Britain is indebted to those illustrious writers for a most salutary revolution in the realms of literature and taste, for a mode of composition which in a mere literary view has been of great and progressive utility; but that a very large portion of the moral and political good which she now enjoys, is to be ascribed to their exertions - to efforts which entitle them to the glorious appellations of genuine patriots and universal benefactors" [Drake]

— Poetry —

In this age, cynicism was fashionable, sobriety was less sought than brilliancy, the morals, sermons, opinions, and ideas of the time were materialistic and superficial; forms, models, and correctness took precedence over passion and emotion. In poetry, harmony of sound, and symmetry of parts received more consideration than motive and aspiration. Pope was the greatest poet,

and the legitimate and representative product of this era, and his works reflect faithfully the manner of its life and thought.

—Pope (1688-1744)—

Alexander Pope, who stands at the head of the verse-writers of this period, - was born in London May 21st, 1688. His parents were Roman Catholics, and to his faith the poet also nominally adhered, thus debarring himself from public office and employment.

After the death of his father in 1717, he made Twickenham his residence and abiding place. And it was here, whither he retired with his widowed mother to whom he was tenderly attached, that he received Frederick, Prince of Wales, and the most celebrated wits, statesmen, and beauties of the day.

Pope was a poet almost from infancy; he "lisped in numbers", and when a mere youth, surpassed all his contemporaries in metrical harmony and correctness.

His pastorals and some translations appeared in 1709, though they were written three or four years earlier. His "Essay on Criticism" (1711) was composed when he was on 21 years of age, and made his reputation.

Pope was the pupil and legitimate successor of Dryden whom he took as a model; when a mere child he persuaded his father to gain him admission to the presence of the great poet.

There is a general resemblance of Pope's poetry, in both its form and spirit, to that of Dryden; and though his style is similar to Dryden's, there are some notable exceptions as in the case of the "Rape of the Lock" - which is one of the most unique and original poems in the language.

Johnson's comparison of Pope with Dryden is familiar to

readers in the following gnotation: "If the flights of Dryden are higher, Pope continues longer on the wing. If of Dryden's fire the blaze is brighter, of Pope's the heat is more regular and constant. Dryden often surpasses expectation, and Pope never falls below it. Dryden is read with frequent astonishment, and Pope with perpetual delight". — Another gnotation from Johnson on the same subject, is not so familiar but perhaps is more instructive: "The style of Dryden is capricious and varied, that of Pope is cautious and uniform; Dryden obeys the motions of his own mind, Pope constrains his mind to his own rules of composition. Dryden is sometimes vehement and rapid, Pope is always smooth, uniform, and gentle. Dryden's page is a natural field, rising into inegnalities, and diversified by the varied exuberance of abundant vegetation, Pope's is a velvet lawn, shaven by the scythe, and levelled by the roller."

That is, Dryden is a representative of nature, Pope of art.

In 1712 appeared the "Rape of the Lock", - "the most airy, the most ingenious, and the most delightful of all his compositions, occasioned by a frolic of gallantry, rather too familiar, in which Lord Petre cut off a lock of Mrs. Arabella Fermor's hair." Another author speaks of this poem as follows: "The finest, most brilliant, mock-heroic poem in the world. Lord Petre cut a lock of hair from the head of a fashionable beauty. A quarrel ensues. To laugh the estranged lovers together again, Pope wrote an epic in gauze and silver spangles. Invocations, apostrophes, councils, fatal catastrophes, fearful combats between beaux and belles, spirits of the air — sylphs, gnomes, nymphs, and salamanders,

form the poetic mechanism and action. The loftiness of style contrasts with the frivolous nature of the events. The history of a trifle is given with the pomp of heraldry, and the meanest things are set off with stately phrase and profuse ornament. A game at cards is a mimic Waterloo, whose hosts are marshalled by the King and queen of hearts."

The "Rape of the Lock" and the "Dunciad," are Pope's greatest works. The last, appearing in 1728, was written to avenge himself on his literary enemies; it was "a declaration of war against the whole tribe of scribblers." Leslie Stephen in his criticism on the "Dunciad" says: "The tone at which Pope is aiming is that suggested by the 'laughing and shaking in Rabelais's easy-chair.' It is meant to be a boisterous guffaw from capacious lungs, an enormous explosion of unqualified contempt for the mob of stupid thick-skinned scribblers. They are to be overwhelmed with gigantic cachinnations, decked in the dirtiest of drains, rolled over and over with rough horse-play, pelted with the least savoury of rotten eggs, not skilfully anatomized or pierced with dexterously directed needles. Pope has really stood by too long, watching their tiresome antics and receiving their taunts, and he must, once for all, speak out and give them a lesson.

> "Out with it, Dunciad! let the secret pass,
> That secret to each fool—that he's an ass!"

Among other works might be mentioned his "Windsor Forest" (1713), "Temple of Fame" (1715), "Epistle of Eloisa", "Eclogy on

an Unfortunate Lady", translations of the Iliad and Odyssey, a volume of his "Literary Correspondence, and the "Essay on Man", — the last having been inspired by Bolingbroke.

In temper Pope was proud, irritable, spiteful, suspicious, and he was sometimes malicious in his attacks. He had a sharp tongue and it grew keen with constant use. But he suffered from an insidious and irritating disease all his life, and it no doubt aggravated the natural tendencies of his peevish disposition and proud nature, which writhed under scorn, ridicule, or censure. Yet he was at bottom kind-hearted, and capable of deep affection.

As a poet, he was deficient in originality and creative power, and thus was inferior to his prototype, Dryden; but as a literary artist, satirist, and moralizer in verse, he is still unrivalled.

He died on the 30th of May, 1744, and was buried in the church at Twickenham.

— Gray (1716–1771) —

Thomas Gray son of the money-scrivener Philip Gray — was born in London Dec. 26th, 1716, and was educated at Eton and Cambridge. While at Eton he became acquainted with Horace Walpole son of the prime minister, whom he accompanied on a tour through France and Italy.

He published his "Ode to Eton College" in 1747, and his "Elegy written in a Country Churchyard" two years later. His "Pindaric Ode" appeared in 1757. On the death of Colley Cibber, he was offered, but declined, the post of Poet Laureate. Shortly after he was appointed Professor of Modern History.

In regard to his attainments scholastic and otherwise, John Milford in his Life of Gray quotes Mr. Temple as follows: "Perhaps Mr. Gray was the most learned man in Europe, he was equally acquainted with the elegant and profound parts of science, and that, not superficially but thoroughly. He knew every branch of history both natural and civil, had read all the original historians of England, France, and Italy; and was a great antiquarian. Criticism, metaphysics, morals, politics, made a principal part of his study. Voyages and Travels of all sorts were his favorite amusements; and he had a fine taste in painting, prints, architecture, and gardening."

His fame rests upon the Elegy of which Johnson says: "In the character of his Elegy I rejoice to concur with the common reader... The Churchyard abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo. — Had Gray written often thus, it had been vain to blame, and useless to praise him."

The story is told that Wolf, on the eve of a decisive battle, was sailing along the St. Lawrence and repeated the Elegy to the other officers in the boat, — and at the close of the recitation he said — "Now, gentlemen, I would rather be the author of that poem than take Quebec!"

Lillian Bell —

K. S. U. — May 23rd 1887 —